

A Critical Evaluation Towards Micro-Teaching With Suggestions for Future Improvements

Jason Murray

Abstract

The following research investigates the attitudes of 28 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers concerning the effectiveness of micro-teaching when used in workshops for teacher development and as an observation tool. The main purpose of the research was to investigate the opinions of the teachers regarding the effectiveness of micro-teaching activities. The research is supported by a questionnaire that evaluates and measures the attitudes of the 28 participants. From this evaluation, future improvements are suggested towards observation procedures that employ micro-teaching in EFL language departments in higher education institutions. The paper also reports and discusses the positive and negative aspects of micro-teaching when used during training sessions and workshops. The paper includes reflections of micro-teaching activities from my own experiences on teacher-training courses and in higher education institutions.

Keywords: *micro-teaching, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), attitudes towards micro-teaching, teacher development, observation procedures*

Introduction

Micro-teaching was introduced by Dr. Dwight W. Allen at Stanford University. Its objective is to give trainee teachers confidence, support, and feedback. The teacher reviews a video recording of the lesson, the review analyzes the main areas; what worked, what did not work, and teaching techniques that could be improved. Outside the main areas, the teacher can reflect on other important areas too. For instance, the behavior of the students, class arrangement (i.e., position of tables and chairs), classroom management, and the teacher's tone of voice and body language. It is largely viewed that micro-teaching provides invaluable feedback from the teacher trainers and teachers. It also allows the teacher an opportunity to test different strategies or experiment using alternative approaches.

Today the use of video for training purposes is a prerequisite for professional development largely for trainee teachers but also experienced teachers. In workshops and training sessions, video training can be used in a variety of ways. From my early experiences when taking a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) course in the UK as a trainee teacher, with my peers, we would analyze and discuss short video clips of lessons with a focus on a specific area of the lesson. The video was generally a model example demonstrated by an experienced teacher trainer. The aim being for the trainee teachers to observe connections between theory and practice (Dymond & Bentz, 2006). Observing a video, the teacher can experience authentic classroom environments (Amobi, 2005). The common view is shared that its effectiveness of micro-teaching enhances professional development, especially as an instrument to engage in reflective practice (Kottkamp, 1990).

With the effectiveness of micro-teaching is an effective tool considered, there is also an argument that staged classes (i.e., teachers play the role of the students) contrive a non-natural environment. Stanley remarks that these experiences can be *too painful* (Stanley, 1998) for teachers. From my own experiences, when viewing staged micro-teaching activities, the actions could be perceived as a comical representation and the environment as artificial. Another area to consider which greatly

impacts the authenticity of micro-teaching is the familiarity that the teacher has with both class and lesson language function. If familiarity with the class has already been established, the observer witnesses a smooth, flawless micro-teaching model. In the case of the teacher being unfamiliar and their decision-making is not influenced by familiarity, the observer would witness a more authentic micro-teaching representation.

Survey Participants and Research Questions

All 28 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers who participated in the survey are working in higher education in Japan. Participation was voluntary. It is intended that the research would be useful, firstly as a proto-type project which could be developed comprehensively at a later stage if I was to investigate micro-teaching activities at a specific place of learning.

Research Questions

The research investigated the following questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions about micro-teaching activities (workshop/observation procedure) in general?
2. What advantages and disadvantages do micro-teaching activities impose?

Answers to the above questions were thought to be helpful for teacher trainers and teachers in EFL language institutions where micro-teaching techniques are employed.

Research Instruments

Data was recorded using a Likert-type scale. *Attitudes towards Micro-teaching* (Appendix A) includes 10 items with five options—*strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree*—which were included in the scale. *Micro-teaching activities in the workshops* (Appendix B) includes five items with five options—*would be of considerable benefit to me, would benefit me, would not benefit me, would not benefit me at all, undecided*—which were included in the scale. To find more comprehensive data, a *micro-teaching opinion box* (Appendix C) was included, where comments concerning an area from the micro-teaching survey questions enabled the teacher to elaborate on a chosen area. Five questions included in the *Attitudes towards Micro-teaching* scale were worded in positively and five questions were worded in a negatively.

Findings

From my survey, the general view revealed that teachers generally held positive attitudes towards micro-teaching applications. For example, concerning its effectiveness for professional development, self-assessment, self-confidence, and material production. However, whilst many teachers were generally enthusiastic about micro-teaching in a workshop environment, there were mixed opinions when the micro-teaching tool is employed to assess and evaluate a teachers' performance for observation purposes.

The percentile values of the responses for 15 items were evaluated in three sections in the study. From the *Attitudes towards Micro-teaching* questionnaire (see Table A1 in Appendix A), positively worded items are displayed in Table A2 and analyze five items. Negatively worded items are displayed in Table A3. From the *Micro-teaching activities in the workshops* questionnaire (see Appendix B), five

items are evaluated in Table B1.

In Table A2, items about the benefits of micro-teaching were evaluated. The positive statements about attitudes of micro-teaching, Items 1–5 imply the beneficial aspects of micro-teaching regarding English language teaching activities in terms of pedagogical practice, evaluating performance, peer-to-peer learning, motivation, and preparing lessons.

Item 1 questioned the motivation aspect of micro-teaching on the current course program. Sixty-four percent of teachers agreed that micro-teaching activities were very motivating in their present occupation while 36% remained undecided. Item 2 questioned whether teachers had a better understanding of teaching methods from micro-teaching. Fifty percent agreed while 50% remained undecided. Most of the participants that volunteered for the survey use a ‘set’ teaching approach such as ‘PPP’ (Presentation Practice Production) or ‘TTT’ (Teach Test Teach). The approaches are common approaches to modern Communicative Language teaching programs that work through the progression in three sequential stages. The data suggests that as teachers in Japanese universities and colleges use a ‘set’ teaching approach, micro-teaching aspects of such methodologies were not viewed as necessarily beneficial. Item 3 questioned whether micro-teaching activities helped teachers prepare lessons more efficiently. Fifty-seven percent agreed while 43% remained undecided. Item 4 questioned whether teachers could learn new teaching techniques from their peers. Seventy-eight point five percent agreed, 7% remained undecided, and 14.5% disagreed. Regarding the responses of the participants in this context, it is possible to state that by observing other teaching styles and strategies and by discussing common subjects of teaching and learning, micro-teaching applications allow participants the opportunity to practice in supportive surroundings. Item 5 questioned whether micro-teaching helped teachers evaluate their teaching performance. Eighty-five point five percent agreed, 7% remained undecided while 7.5% disagreed.

The statements in Table A3 examining the negative aspects of micro-teaching applications from teachers’ perspectives (Items 6–10)—are concerned with micro-teaching effectiveness as a tool for analyzing teaching methods, the artificiality of the classroom environment, learner anxiety in a micro-teaching lesson and hindrances of micro-teaching in the learning process. These items were listed with the positive statements on the *Attitudes towards Micro-teaching* questionnaire (see Table A1).

Item 6 questioned the effectiveness of the micro-teaching as a tool for teaching methods. Seventy-eight point five percent disagreed and considered that micro-teaching is a useful tool, while 21.5% remained undecided. Item 7 questioned the artificiality of a micro-teaching lesson. Forty-three percent agreed, 28.5% remained undecided, and 28.5% disagreed. The data suggest that teachers do not feel comfortable in a micro-teaching environment therefore, inhibiting their natural approach to teaching. Item 8 examined the hindrances of micro-teaching (i.e., students feeling pressured in a micro-teaching lesson). Twenty-eight point five percent of teachers accepted that micro-teaching activities hindered students’ learning. Forty-three percent were undecided and 28.5% disagreed. Item 9 examined the extent to which a teacher would take when teaching. This may include a timeline on the whiteboard or an aspect of phonology using the IPA symbols. Forty-three percent agreed that they would be less inclined to teach in-depth as opposed to a lesson not employing the micro-teaching technique. Fourteen percent were undecided and 43% disagreed. The data suggested conflicted opinions which were similar to the results from Item 7. The issue being that micro-teaching prohibits teachers from teaching naturally without feeling restricted. Item 10 questioned whether micro-teaching created hindrances within the learning program. This question bought mixed opinions from teachers as 43% disagreed, 43% remained undecided, and 14% agreed.

The statements in Table B1, examined teachers’ preferences towards future micro-teaching

activities in workshops. Items 1–5 state preferences for more emphasis on the following areas: teaching methodologies, teaching pronunciation, motivating students, error correction and, giving feedback.

Item 1 examined more emphasis on teaching methodologies. Seventy-nine percent suggested that this would be beneficial for them while 14% suggested that this would not benefit them. Seven percent were undecided. This could suggest that while teachers feel that methodologies such as The Communicative Approach is effective for General/Discussion English programs with a specific lesson function language (Richards & Rogers, 2001), many teachers suggested that English speaking programs which require the students to debate or to think critically without a function language are more suitable for Content-based Instruction lessons. Item 2 examined more emphasis on teaching pronunciation. Fifty-seven percent responded negatively, indicated that this would not be of benefit, while 36% thought pronunciation would be of benefit. Seven percent remained undecided. The results suggest that there are mixed opinions among teachers regarding teaching pronunciation. It could be argued that higher education college managements/course developers are more concerned with production from the students (i.e., speaking is everything). Therefore, integrating aspects of phonology into the lessons is not considered important. Item 3 analyzed more emphasis on motivating students. Eighty-six percent advocated that this would be of benefit. Seven percent did not see this as beneficial while 7% were undecided. In my experience, most teachers I have worked with in universities and colleges share the same opinion and that is successful language learning is largely down to motivating and motivated students. Item 4 examined error correction. Seventy-nine percent suggested that there should be more emphasis on error correction in their workshops, 7% did not see it as beneficial, and 14% were undecided. Again, the results were largely influenced by the teachers' lesson guidelines at their places of work. Item 5 examined more emphasis on giving feedback. Ninety-three percent thought that this would be of considerable benefit. Seven percent were undecided. Though the results suggest that teachers would like more emphasis on giving feedback in micro-teaching activities, there is a lot of criticism from teachers suggesting that the micro-teaching activities primarily focus on student feedback regarding the use of the function language as opposed to content heard during the activities.

Suggestion for Future Improvements

The findings of this study dealing with questioning the positive and negative points of micro-teaching applications in general support that micro-teaching applications are practical experiences for meeting the desired objectives of training teachers to become effective and reflective in the teaching profession. The overall results indicate that teachers were satisfied with the applications of micro-teaching. The data also showed that overall, teachers welcomed the use of micro-teaching activities and appreciated its benefits either in the workshop or as an assessment tool. Additionally, the findings specify the creativity and resourcefulness of the micro-teaching activities and prove that teachers, strongly acknowledge the usefulness of micro-teaching for boosting creativity. It is also efficient for introducing various materials, encourages teachers to put more consideration when preparing for lessons, and is beneficial for evaluating teaching performance and getting feedback. Besides, micro-teaching assists and enhances teachers to develop teaching techniques and learning strategies. Since micro-teaching focuses on teacher behaviors, it gives clues about weak and strong indications of teachers and enables the teacher to be more proficient in their profession.

Although the optimistic views about micro-teaching were confirmed by the 28 participants in this

survey, some negative aspects were also admitted by the participants. On occasions, for time-saving purposes, micro-teaching applications are carried out with teacher trainers and in some cases, the university staff taking the roles of teachers and students. This form of micro-teaching has often been criticized by teachers, arguing that artificial classroom settings, where the learners were not real students, simply followed instructions. This issue was raised by 25% of the survey participants in the *micro-teaching opinion box* in the survey (Appendix C).

In this study, 28 teachers' attitudes towards micro-teaching were examined to identify the benefits and disadvantages of micro-teaching and the participants' responses to the items in the questionnaire affirmed that micro-teaching is a favorable learning and teaching experience. Therefore, the findings in this study support those who state the beneficial aspects of micro-teaching applications.

From the survey results, some suggestions can be presented for further studies and applications of micro-teaching: micro-teaching as a professional tool in teacher training departments needs to be applied to motivate teachers; however, results have suggested criticisms, namely teachers feeling awkward and declining to teach in-depth when demonstrating in a micro-teaching lesson. Teacher trainers need to give their staff more encouragement to be as natural as possible in a micro-teaching lesson. During feedback from teacher trainers, teachers' areas to improve should be given in a constructive way to learn by their mistakes. By doing this, teachers will reflect and see the importance of micro-teaching. For implementing 'staged' micro-teaching activities, such as where teachers 'act out' situations. Education policies of teacher training institutions, curriculum developers, and teaching staff at those institutions should consider the importance of staging correct and incorrect models of teaching.

General Criticisms Towards Observation Procedures

Universities and colleges have observation procedures which vary according to their programs. However, most follow a similar procedure (i.e., the video is watched, evaluated, and discussed). The general criticisms by teachers regarding the observation procedure are similar. For example, scheduling the observed lesson between teacher and teacher trainer, arranging a follow-up meeting, and writing Self-Evaluation Forms can be very time-consuming during a busy semester. Also, teachers often stress that they feel restricted from teaching naturally and that the classroom environment can seem artificial.

Suggestions to Improve Observation Procedures

From my testimony, teachers often comment that they would welcome having the opportunity to discuss teaching matters with their peers as it would alleviate stress. I suggest that a peer observation system would be more beneficial for the teacher as it would promote a team-based work environment. Peer observation would not be an evaluation. Teachers would not be asked to grade their peer's lessons. The system would be viewed as a collaboration (i.e., teachers sharing ideas and offering suggestions to improve their teaching skills).

How Would the System Work?

Teacher trainers would assign pairs among teachers. For the follow-up meetings to run smoothly

during the semester, the teacher trainers could assign teachers with similar schedules. Teachers would watch their peer's videos and focus their feedback on the area(s) requested by their peers, as well as answering some general questions concerning the unit and student's level. Teachers that do not feel comfortable observing or being observed by a peer for whatever reason, may choose to be observed by a teacher trainer as an alternative.

Documentation and Observation Procedure for Teachers

Each teacher would complete both the *Peer Observation: Self-Evaluation* form (see Appendix D) and the *Peer Feedback* form (see Appendix E).

Step 1

The lesson is taped.

Step 2

The teacher completes the *Peer Observation: Self-Evaluation* form at the end of their lesson.

Step 3

The form would be then photocopied and given to their partner (the observer).

Step 4

The observer would then use the information when he/she fills in the *Peer Feedback* form, during, or after viewing the tape. The final section would be completed at the end of the follow-up meeting.

Step 5

The follow-up meeting

Step 6

The teacher completes the final section of the *Peer Feedback* form.

Conclusion

The research of 28 teachers' attitudes towards micro-teaching was examined to evaluate current micro-teaching activities in the participant's places of work. The participant's responses to the items in the scale largely affirmed the importance of micro-teaching. Therefore, the findings in this study support those who state the beneficial aspects of micro-teaching applications. From the findings, a high percentage of the participants shared the same view that more emphasis on areas teaching such as teaching methodologies, error correction, and giving feedback in micro-teaching workshops would be beneficial for self-development. Furthermore, regarding observation procedures, it is hoped that this paper encourages implanting peer-to-peer micro-teaching activities as it would be of considerable benefit for teachers and management staff especially in language departments that offer English programs for a considerable number of students. With sufficient support from the school management and administrative staff (Richards, 2001), teachers would feel more of a sense of responsibility having the authority to conduct meetings themselves with their peers. Such a system in place would greatly impact teacher professional development and could create a healthy working environment among teachers and school management.

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Appendix A

Table A1

Attitudes towards Micro-teaching	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Strongly disagree	Disagree
<i>Micro-teaching activities are very motivating in my present occupation.</i>					
<i>Micro-teaching activities are not a very effective tool for analyzing teaching methods.</i>					
<i>I understand teaching methods with more clarity with micro-teaching activities.</i>					
<i>When I present in a micro-teaching lesson I feel awkward therefore the lesson isn't a true reflection of my teaching.</i>					
<i>Micro-teaching activities help me to prepare lessons more efficiently.</i>					
<i>Micro-teaching hinders the students. (i.e. students feel pressured in a micro-teaching lesson.)</i>					
<i>I'm able to learn new teaching techniques from my peers through micro-teaching activities.</i>					
<i>I'm less inclined to demonstrate in-depth when presenting a micro-teaching lesson. (i.e. illustrate with grammatical timelines, etc.)</i>					
<i>Micro-teaching activities help me evaluate my teaching performance.</i>					
<i>Micro-teaching creates hindrances within the learning process.</i>					

Table A2

Attitudes towards Micro-teaching (Positively worded)	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Strongly disagree	Disagree
<i>Micro-teaching activities are very motivating in my present occupation.</i>		64%	36%		
<i>I understand teaching methods with more clarity with micro-teaching activities.</i>	7%	43%	50%		
<i>Micro-teaching activities help me to prepare lessons more efficiently.</i>	7%	50%	43%		
<i>I'm able to learn new teaching techniques from my peers through micro-teaching activities.</i>	28.5%	50%	7%		14.5%
<i>Micro-teaching activities help me evaluate my teaching performance.</i>	21.5%	64%	7%		7.5%

Table A3

Attitudes towards Micro-teaching (Negatively worded)	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Strongly disagree	Disagree
<i>Micro-teaching activities are not a very effective tool for analyzing teaching methods.</i>			21.5%	21.5%	57%
<i>When I present in a micro-teaching lesson I feel awkward therefore the lesson isn't a true reflection of my teaching.</i>		43%	28.5%		28.5%
<i>Micro-teaching hinders the students. (i.e. students feel pressured in a micro-teaching lesson.)</i>		28.5%	43%		28.5%
<i>I'm less inclined to demonstrate in-depth when presenting a micro-teaching lesson. (i.e. illustrate with grammatical timelines, etc.)</i>	7%	36%	14%	15%	28%
<i>Micro-teaching creates hindrances within the learning process.</i>		14%	43%		43%

Appendix B

Table B1

Micro-teaching activities in the workshops	This would be of considerable benefit to me	This would benefit me	This would not benefit me	This would not benefit me at all	Undecided
<i>In micro-teaching activities in future workshops, I'd like to see more emphasis on teaching methodologies.</i>	22%	57%	14%		7%
<i>In micro-teaching activities in future workshops, I'd like to see more emphasis on teaching pronunciation.</i>	29%	7%	43%	14%	7%
<i>In micro-teaching activities in future workshops, I'd like to see more emphasis on motivating students.</i>	50%	36%	7%		7%
<i>In micro-teaching activities in future workshops, I'd like to see more emphasis on error correction.</i>	7%	72%	7%		14%
<i>In micro-teaching activities in future workshops, I'd like to see more emphasis on giving feedback.</i>	14%	79%			7%

Appendix C

In the box below, please could you choose an area of micro-teaching from this survey and briefly outline your thoughts and opinions concerning that area. This could be an area that you think is of benefit, of no benefit, or something you would like to learn more about to develop your teaching skills.

The information you provide will be used as quantitative data to support my research. All comments are strictly confidential and will not be disclosed. Your chosen micro-teaching area(s) subject to comment, will only be highlighted in the Research Paper as statistical data.

*Thank you for participating in this survey.
Jason Murray*

Appendix D

Peer Observation: Self-Evaluation Form (to be filled in by the teacher who is observed)					
Teacher Information					
Name:			Position:	Please circle FT / PT	
Date:					
Class Information					
Date & Lesson Period:			Number of students:		
(e.g. May 25, Period 2)					
Course:		Level:		Unit:	
	(e.g. Debate, Presentation)				
Question 1					
What were your strong points in this lesson?					
Question 2					
What were your weak points in this lesson?					
Question 3					
How could you have improved this lesson?					
Question 4					
What do you think is challenging about teaching this unit or level?					
Question 5					
Which areas would you like your peer observer to concentrate on while watching your lesson?					
Question 6					
Is there anything about this class and/or these students you would like your peer observer to take into account?					

Appendix E

Peer Feedback Form (to be filled in by the observer)			
Teacher information			
Name:		The teacher you observed:	
Before the follow-up meeting			
Question 1			
Please comment on areas mentioned by your partner in <u>Question 5</u> of their Self-Evaluation form.			
Question 2			
Can you suggest alternative ways to do any of the activities in the lesson?			
Question 3			
What new ideas or techniques did you learn from this lesson?			
Question 4			
What do you think is challenging about teaching this level or unit?			
After the follow-up meeting			
As a result of the Peer Observation process, what new suggestions or ideas do you plan to implement into your lessons?			